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Testimony to House Homeland Security & Public Safety Committee on House Bill 316 (Howard)

NAMI Texas is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization founded by volunteers in 1984. We are part of the nation's largest grassroots mental health organizations and we exist to help improve the quality of life for individuals with mental illness and their families. Around the state, we have 27 local NAMI affiliate organizations and approximately 2,000 members.

Suicide prevention is a critical need in our state.

Suicide is a crisis in our state, especially amongst our youngest and oldest Texans.

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death amongst youth ages 10 to 24, and 4,600 young people die each year by suicide.¹
- 1 in 8 high school students in Texas reported a suicide attempt in the past year, almost twice the national average.²
- The suicide rate in Texas has increased by 23% since 2000.³
 - Suicide rates amongst 55-64 year olds increased by 55%.³

Suicide prevention and firearm safe storage go hand in hand.

Suicide is very preventable. Suicide attempts are often impulsive and triggered by an immediate crisis.

- In 71% of suicide attempts that do not result in death, the person attempting made that decision within the hour.⁴
 - In about a quarter of attempts, the decision is made within 5 minutes.⁴
- Suicidal impulses typically last only a short period of time.⁴
- The vast majority of people (90%) who attempt suicide and survive do not go on to die by suicide.⁵

If we can prevent the initial attempt from being successful, we can save lives. Suicide attempts with a gun, however, rarely afford a second chance. Suicide attempts by gun are usually successful and there is little opportunity for rescue or halt mid-attempt.

- About 85% of suicide attempts with a gun are fatal.⁵
 - Only 2% of overdoses, the most widely used method in suicide attempts, end in death.⁵
- Firearms are the leading method of suicide: they account for half of all suicide deaths.⁶
- Most gun deaths are suicides: Suicides represent two-thirds of all gun deaths.⁷
- Firearm suicide rates are greater in TX compared to the US.
 - In 2015, firearm was the leading cause of suicide in both Texas and the U.S.⁸

- The rate of firearm suicide was 7.3 per 100,000 in Texas vs. 6.5 per 100,000 in the U.S.⁸
- **Families need education on how to safely store firearms.**

Many families aren't aware that their children and teenagers know how to access their firearms and may get hurt.

- Of the homes with children and firearms, 55% were reported to have one or more firearms in an unlocked place, and 43% reported keeping guns without a trigger lock in an unlocked place.⁹
- Among teens living in homes with guns, the study found that roughly 40% of those who had serious risk factors for suicide (such as recent depression or suicidal thoughts) and roughly 40% who had attempted suicide in the past year reported having “easy access” to the guns in their home.¹⁰
- A 1999 study found that more than 75% of the guns used in youth suicide attempts and unintentional injuries were stored in the residence of the victim, a relative, or a friend.¹¹
- 73% of children under age 10 living in homes with guns reported knowing the location of their parents' firearms.¹²
- Among gun-owning parents who reported that their children had never handled their firearms at home, 22% of the children, questioned separately, said that they had.⁴
- 199,670 children in Texas live with unlocked, loaded firearms in the home.¹³

Conclusion

We need this bill to help families and communities keep children and other individuals who are at risk of dying by suicide safe and healthy. Educating the public on suicide prevention and firearm safe storage can save lives, and this bill will help educate families and communities across Texas.

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